DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 207 FL 007 074

AUTHOR Leap, William L.
TITLE Prospects for American Indian English Linguistics Research. Papers in Southwest English 1: Research Techniques and Prospects.
INSTITUTION Trinity Univ., San Antonio, Tex.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 11p.
AVAILABLE FROM Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas 78284 ($2.00)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Languages; *American Indians; Dialect Studies; *Diglossia; English; *English (Second Language); Geographic Regions; Grammar; Interference (Language Learning); Language Research; Language Usage; Language Variation; *Nonstandard Dialects; Regional Dialects; Second Languages; Syntax
IDENTIFIERS *American Indian English; Black English; Southwest English

ABSTRACT

Several focal points for southwestern American Indian English research are proposed. This variation is used on reservations or in urban Indian enclaves when the "Indianness" of the discussion or participants needs formal linguistic marking. One research goal is to demonstrate that tribal varieties of Indian English actually exist. Analysis shows that Indian English grammatical and phonological structures are often replications of the Indian language detail. American Indian English may have had a fairly recent origin in federal boarding schools where only English could be spoken in classrooms and dormitories by the Indian students of various tribes. A second area for research is the idea that current American Indian English dialects vary predictably according to the native language rules. Dialects of American Indian English contain grammatical features common to other nonstandard dialects, such as Black English. Testing is underway to determine whether the dialect factors arise from similar motivations. Another research project is a study of the Indian English patterns within a given community to yield information about both grammatical structures in the Indian language and first-language interference in learning standard English. A final research area is the need for educational techniques and policy to develop diglossic fluency in both standard and American Indian English. (CHK)

PROSPECTS FOR AMERICAN INDIAN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS RESEARCH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John D. Bransford, Dept. of English, Trinity U.
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

William L. Leap
The American University

ED111207

This paper[1] discusses a focus for southwestern English research which in my belief holds great prospect for scholar and native speaker alike. The English variety in question may be termed American Indian (or Native American) English. The variety is used by persons in reservation communities and urban Indian enclaves when the Indianness of the discussion topic, of the conversational situation, or of the participants themselves needs formal linguistic marking. While such American Indian English usage does not preclude simultaneous control over standard English styles, such a diglossic balance is not always effected by all speakers. Frequently, American Indian English is the first form, and may remain the only form, of English language expression acquired by the community membership. Since analysis tends to reveal American Indian English grammatical and phonological structures as replications of the groups' Indian language detail, the acquisition process may involve nothing more than the addition of English lexical synonyms to complement existing or developing Indian language facility. In this sense, Native American English can be characterized as a means of talking to the outside world (literally) in Indian terms. For this reason, I view American Indian English as a continuation

FL007074

---

[1]Thanks and gratitude to Amy Zaharlick, Steven Stout, Margaret Leshinsky, Mitchell Ratner, John R. Wayne, Francis J. Green, Paul Cissna, and the other students at The American University associated with the Southern Tiwa Project, of which the research interests here are one part; thanks also to Ruth Landman, Paul Turner, Gibson Gardner, Gina Harvey, Richard Heizer, Joan Reed, and Elizabeth Brandt, for their support and encouragement of these efforts, and to The American University for its assistance in funding the research in the summer, 1974.

of the speakers' native language tradition; in situations where the Indian language itself is no longer a part of the community's verbal repertoire, it may be the only continuation of that tradition which now remains.

The statements of the preceding paragraph constitute a set of claims about the nature of Native American English. In developing an understanding of the legitimacy and implications of these claims lie the prospects for research to which this paper calls attention. Indeed, the most immediate goal must be the demonstration that such varieties do indeed exist, an effort which will require both descriptive and historical investigation. The available literature hardly suggests that Indian people speak tribally-specific varieties of English, nor does it clarify the motivations which underlie the existence of any single such code. Hall and Leechman (1955), in one of the earliest discussions of a distinctive Indian form of English expression, emphasize the pidgin-like quality of the "broken English" ascribed to Native Americans in the fiction and gentlemen-traveler narratives of the James Fenimore Cooper period. Their comment on the origin of this code--that Anglos spoke baby-talk to the Indian who replied in kind--may explain where Tonto got his "get-um up, Scout," but offers no explanation of how such an oversimplified code might relate to the full-fledged means of verbal expression we observe in the Indian English speaker today.

In much the same vein, Dillard's comments (1972:139-185) fail to suggest how a trade-related, runaway-slave inspired, East-coast focused "Red" English might have spread to the southwest or the northwest coast tribes, or why the earliest records of American Indian English in those areas show markedly differing sentence details. Edward Dozier (1970) and

McNeil (forthcoming) argue, in contrast, that the English-only classroom and dormitory policies of the federal boarding schools may have encouraged young people of diverse tribal backgrounds to develop communicative competence in English as rapidly as possible. The development of control over an English vocabulary which could become integrated into existing (Indian language) sentence-formation skills became quite to the immediate point.

In terms of the puebloan Southwest, the idea that Native American English (as well as standard English, for that matter) might have had such a recent origin is suggested by the linguistic stratification currently visible within the reservation speech community. Oldest members tend to have their nonIndian fluency in Spanish, while persons who, unlike their elders, were part of the boarding school effort of the 20's and 30's are the community's oldest American Indian English speakers. (See Bodine 1968 for an illustration of this situation at Taos pueblo.) That the boarding school context did not preclude the acquisition of standard language skills is suggested by the letters sent from the artist of the Isleta Paintings to the anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons (Goldfrank 1967). As Wayne (1974) has shown, Isletan English and standard English constructions are employed in those letters along lines similar to the community's current usage pattern: standard English in the greetings and polite questionings of the introductory paragraphs, Isletan English when the cerem[illegible]ial details of the Paintings' content are explained.

The boarding school hypothesis also helps explain why current Native American English varieties differ from each other in definable and predictable ways--specifically, in parallel to the features which characterize,

and distinguish, the community's Indian language detail, Herein lies a second prospect for Indian English research. Based on the apparent Southern Tiwa specifics of the phonological pattern and structural syntax of Isletan English, and in contrast to some less formalized analyses of Siouan and Keresan English, I have claimed (Leap 1973) that there can be as many varieties of American Indian English as there are distinctive Indian languages spoken in the United States today. Additional support for this claim has come from Alford's study of what he terms the "Cheyenne dialect of English" (Alford 1974) and Penfield's report of the linguistic uniqueness of the Mohave English spoken within a southwestern Colorado schooling program (Penfield forthcoming). Of interest in the situation Penfield describes is the fact that four different Indian speech communities, hence four audibly and structurally distinctive American Indian English varieties. are represented within the classroom population. Darnell's (1974) discussion of Cree-English bilingualism begins to suggest a similar state of affairs exists within the Canadian provinces.

What complicates a clear picture of the community- or tribally-specific uniqueness of American Indian English varieties is the fact that these codes also contain grammatical features common to other forms of non-standard English expression. Inspection shows that some of these similarities are superficially typological: double negation in Isletan English, for example, may be reminiscent of a common feature of Black English, yet the Isletan construction is used in complementary distribution with single (verb-only) negation, following constraints which exactly parallel the two possibilities of negation reference in Isletan Tiwa. No such syntactic motivation would appear to underlie the Black English construction. Others

of these similarities, particularly the use of uninflected verb forms (specifically, uninflected, distributive be), cannot be so readily accounted for in Indian language terms. Before accepting this as support for the Black basis of Red English, as Dillard would argue, Margaret Leshinsky and I decided to test the empirical reality of this convergence during the 1974 field season. To do this, we gave 25 Isletan, 18 Anglo, and nine Spanish-speaking students enrolled in the same junior high school program a test modeled after the procedure used by Fasold to retrieve auxiliary evaluations for troublesome Black English sentences (see Fasold 1969). The test calls for a dialogue between the investigator and respondent of the following sort: the investigator says "John drives a car." The respondent replies with the sentence frame, "I know _____," adding the pronominal equivalent of the subject person and number, and his assessment of the sentence auxiliary, to complete the response expression, i.e., "I know he does." The investigator repeats the supplied auxiliary in the frame, "_____ what?" and the respondent completes the dialogue by supplying the remainder of the original sentence, "drives a car." In similar fashion, we have, "The school is near the pueblo." "I know it is." "Is what?" "Near the pueblo." Applying this protocol to 21 Isletan English sentences, we were able to obtain person-number evaluations and auxiliary assessments for Isletan English sentences like, "Each pueblo comes to their own authority," "They talked about anything, much," and "The willow tree grow by the river," as well as sentences with uninflected be, like, "That man, he be the governor." Fasold's now classic "Robin's be flyin in the sky" was included in the corpus for comparative purposes.

The test was administered to determine where, and in terms of what variables, the responses of the three populations would differ. After working through the sentences orally, we supplied each respondent with a copy of the test and invited him to change or correct any detail which seemed incorrect, inappropriate, or unfamiliar. This offered the respondents a broader basis for sentence interpretation and gave us a wider basis for population comparison. To gain further comparative perspective, the same Isletan English sentences were submitted to 26 Black junior high students in Seat Pleasant (Prince George's County), Maryland, during the second half of the summer. If in fact the Black English and Isletan English use of uninflected be arises from similar motivations, there should be convergence within their respective responses to the sentences containing uninflected be within the corpus. The assessments should resemble each other more than either set would resemble the responses of the Anglos or the Spanish speakers. Dan Alford is currently giving the same test to a group of Cheyenne English speakers, and comparison with the Maori English investigation of Janet MaCallum, where uninflected be constructions have likewise been disclosed, will offer native New Zealanders' perspective on this question.

The data from the investigation are still being explored (a portion of the argument will be presented in Leap 1975). Yet at the present juncture, it is already apparent that the similarities and differences within various forms of nonstandard English readily yield to empiricalization and need not remain only as impressionistically based observations of typological similarity. In this sense, I quite agree with Blount's questioning (1974) of my earlier discussion of the Southern Tiwa

basis of Isletan English, on the grounds that no processual evidence had been presented in support of my claim. Processual interpretation must be applied to the explication of Isletan language input into Isletan English sentence formation. We are planning just such a project at Isleta for summer, 1975. The discussion of English sentence negation in Stockwell et al. (1973:270-93) presents constraints quite distinct from those necessary to account for the derivation of negative sentences in Isletan Tiwa. These differences (see Leap 1974) are sufficient to allow negative sentences of Isletan English to be evaluated in terms of each analytical model, to see whether standard English or Isletan Tiwa grammatical process better accounts for the formation of the Isletan English expressions. Should some synthesis of the two processes seem necessary, the specifics of that synthesis (and thereby a clue to the way in which bilingualism has been naturally achieved within the Isletan speech community) will likewise become empirically apparent.

Such an investigation is possible only because we have a clear idea of the English language negation process and some indication of what may be happening in Isletan deep structure. As far as southwest Indian linguistics is concerned, there are few descriptively adequate structural statements and even fewer generative descriptions which can be utilized in this regard. Herein is another prospect for Indian English research: the study of Native American English should give scholars more than adequate reasons for restoring attention to Indian language details themselves. A clarification of the patternings and constraints within the American Indian English of a given community will readily suggest hypotheses about phonological and grammatical structures which one would expect to find within

the community's Indian language expression, just as it may also help predict the kinds of first-language interference with which the American Indian English speaker will have to contend when learning to read and write in the standard language. Steven Stout is currently exploring the former possibility in a preliminary study of Santa Ana Keresan English. Harvey (1974) and Kuhlman and Longoni (forthcoming) have already begun to examine the latter possibilities in their respective discussions of the implications which "dormitory English" and Papago English have for Indian education. Joan Reed and I are hoping to explore a similar theme within the Navajo phase of Kenneth Goodman's more general study of the motivations which underlie reading miscues.

Within these possibilities lies the final prospect which the study of southwestern American Indian English makes available. Certainly, the rather open-ended descriptive and theoretical prospects already outlined--establishing the existence of American Indian English, its tribally-specific distribution, its nonstandard English connection, and its Indian language motivation--make for fun and excitement within the profession, but that excitement easily spills over and joins with the concerns which speakers of Native American English themselves will readily manifest: the development of more effective educational priority, policy, and strategy within Native American schooling programs. Let me give just one example. The "errors" in English usage which turn up in the Indian English speakers' written compositions may in fact be errors only when evaluated in standard language perspective. The constructions depart from standard terms, because they are conditioned by quite separate linguistic motivations: they attest to the Indian language structure underlying the spoken (Indian) English

fluency and as such are not errors in the linguistic sense at all. A red circle drawn around the faulty agreement within a sentence like "Two womens was out there fighting" criticizes the student for an effective use of his speaker knowledge; attacking that usage attacks his right to fluency! Classroom effort could just as easily, and more effectively, center on the development of simultaneous diglossic fluency in standard as well as American Indian English, a balance which many Indian speech communities have already achieved without the assistance of textbooks, textbook writers, or the analyses they both require. This aspect of the study of Native American English, a unity of professional concern with ongoing community effort, is perhaps the most exciting prospect of all.

REFERENCES

Alford, Dan. 1974. "The Cheyenne dialect of English and educational implications." Cheyenne Title VII project. Unpublished ms.

Blount, Ben. 1974. Review of Paul Turner, ed. Bilingualism in the Southwest. Reviews in Anthropology 1:44-57.

Bodine, John James. 1968. "Taos names: A clue to linguistic acculturation." Anthropological Linguistics 10:23-27.

Darnell, Regna. 1974. "Cree-English bilingualism in northern Alberta." Paper presented to the IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (Chicago).

Dillard, J. L. 1972. Black English. New York: Random House.

Dozier, Edward. 1970. The Pueblo Indians of North America. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

Fasold, Ralph W. 1969. "Tense and the form be in Black English." Language 45:763-776.

Goldfrank, Esther S. 1967. The Artist of Isleta Paintings in Pueblo Society. Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, 5. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press.

Hall, Robert A., and Douglas Leechman. 1955. "American Indian pidgin English: Attestations and grammatical peculiarities." American Speech 30:163-171.

Harvey, Gina C. 1974. "Dormitory English: Implications for the teacher." In Garland Bills, ed. Southwest areal linguistics. San Diego: Institute for Cultural Pluralism.

Kuhlman, N., and R. Longoni. Forthcoming. "Indian English and its implications for education." In Gina C. Harvey and Richard Heizer, eds. Proceedings of the Third Southwest Areal Language and Linguistics Workshop.

Leap, William L. 1973. "Ethnics, emics and the 'new' ideology: The identity potential of American Indian English." In Thomas Fitzgerald, ed. Social and Cultural Identity. Southern Anthropological Society, Proceedings no. 8. Athens: University of Georgia, 51-62.

_____. 1974. "Negation and what to do with it in Isletan Tiwa." Unpublished ms.

_____. 1975. "To be in Isletan English: A study in accountability." To be presented at the Conference on Pidgins and Creoles (Honolulu).

McNeil, Pearl. Forthcoming. The Carlisle Indian School: A strategy in Indian education. Unpublished American University dissertation.

Penfield, Susan. Forthcoming. "Indian English: Mohave." In Gina C. Harvey and Richard Heizer, eds. Proceedings of the Third Southwest Areal Language and Linguistics Workshop.

Stockwell, Robert P., Paul Schachter, and Barbara Hall Partee. 1973. The major syntactic structures of English. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

Wayne, John R., Jr. 1974. "Isletan English in the letters of Pablo Lente." Unpublished ms.